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CHAPTER EIGHT

JESSE LAWSON AND THE NATIONAL SOCIOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF 1903

MICHAEL R. HILL

Introduction

The National Sociological Society, rather than the American Sociological Society (now Association), was apparently the first American organization with national aspirations to place, in 1903, the fateful word "Sociological" in its corporate name.¹ Unfortunately, the recent centennial of the National Sociological Society (NSS) passed unnoticed and uncelebrated. The NSS, convened in 1903, was a short-lived organization of African Americans and whites, Northerners and Southerners, academic men, politicians, clergymen, and others, who vigorously confronted the most pressing conundrum in Jim Crow America: how to solve the race problem. The NSS was championed by Jesse Lawson—an African-American attorney, educator, and sociologist in Washington, D.C.—who became the organization's first and only president. The remarkable interracial NSS meeting in November, 1903, was a tribute to Lawson's energy, cooperative vision, and organizational skills. The NSS, with its sharply-focused emphasis on addressing a deeply difficult and divisive social problem, its inclusive embrace of African American and white members, its national reach,

¹ Organizational predecessors to the NSS included the grand vision of international sociology introduced via academic congresses at the Paris Exposition in the summer of 1900, with papers published in the *Annales de l'Institut de Sociologie* in 1901. The Sociological Society of London held an organizational meeting in June, 1903, followed by a General Meeting in November, 1903. Four substantive meetings of the London society were held during the Spring and Summer of 1904, with the papers comprising the first volume of *Sociological Papers* published in 1905 (a year after the proceedings of the NSS appeared). As to formal associations generally, Furner (1975) provides a detailed study of early social science movements in the US. For a brief account of the history of the American Sociological Association, see American Sociological Society (1906a); Rhoades (1981); and, on the birth of the *American Sociological Review*, Lengermann (1979).

and its decidedly political agenda, was born full-grown and died as quickly, but serves us still as a concrete historical instance of a crucial element too often lacking in professional sociological organizations today: corporate mobilization for responsible social change (cf., Feagin 2001; Feagin and Vera 2001; Gilman 2004; Hill 2001).

Our professional failure to acknowledge and celebrate the centennial of the NSS in 2003 reflects an important lesson for disciplinary historians: our collective disciplinary account is fundamentally provisional and is always subject to updating. Disciplinary history is a “working hypothesis” in the pragmatic sense suggested by George Herbert Mead (1899). It is, at any given moment, an hypothesis that can be improved and strengthened over time by iterative revisiting of documents and archival data (Hill 1993) with the dual aims, always, of reducing class bias, racial bigotry, sexual chauvinism, and misinformation generally, while also more carefully and inclusively documenting organizational complexities, interpersonal interconnections, intellectual currents, and the incontrovertible facticity of temporal and spatial reality (Hill 2001b). When it comes to our disciplinary history, we can always do better, and we must forever be ready to learn new things.

The road to disciplinary history is replete with hidden traps for unwary researchers, as this writer has occasionally discovered to his own chagrin. For instance, Monroe Work (1916, 19), writing in the *Negro Yearbook* for 1916–1917, asserted that “the greatest example of whites and Negroes cooperating for social uplift is through the Southern Sociological Congress” and that “the constitution adopted by this organization, in 1911, sets forth as one of its objects ‘The solving of the race question in a spirit of helpfulness to the Negro and of equal justice to both races.’”² What a wonderful historical gem to discover! But, we must read cautiously. In this instance, because Work, who took *immediate* activity as the temporal frame of reference for his periodic *Yearbook*, intended neither to assess nor to document historical *precedent*. The consequences of authorial situation and intent are not only important, but are also largely knowable in many circumstances. It turns out that I initially misapprehended the

² The Southern Sociological Congress, begun in 1911, received short shrift in Simpson’s (1988) otherwise useful narrative of the Southern Sociological Society. For a critical discussion of this omission, see Frey (2001).

temporality of Work's statement, and mistakenly assigned precedence to the Southern Sociological Congress (SSC). In fact, the SSC was neither the first such sociological organization nor was it the only important exemplar of "whites and Negroes cooperating for social uplift." Nearly a decade earlier, in 1903, the National Sociological Society led the way, predating not only the SSC itself but also the 1905 founding of the American Sociological Society. Untangling and updating the contributions of early African-American sociologists to our collective professional history is an important and ongoing project.

As a special problem within the history of sociology, Blasi (2000), Broschart (1991), Deegan (1988b, 1991, 2000a, b, 2002a, b), Feagin (2001), Feagin and Vera (2001), Frey (2001), Hill (1996), Hunter (2000), Johnson (2003), Lengermann and Niebrugge-Brantley (1998, 2002), and Stanfield (1985, 1993), among others, have usefully illustrated and have often explicated various difficulties involved in drawing balanced, representative portraits of the contributions of African Americans to the discipline of sociology. In a variety of consequential ways, for example, the lingering and still powerful aura of the Chicago School of race relations—with Robert E. Park and his students routinely portrayed as central and heroic figures therein—has largely usurped the field of vision, resulting in a perversely narrow and temporally truncated account of African American activities in American sociology. Venomous bickering and intentional obfuscation between partisan champions of Booker T. Washington, on the one hand, and W.E.B. DuBois, on the other, have also clouded numerous analyses of the historical record. Scholarly dereliction, post-modern banality, rampant scientism, elitist snobbery, bald racism, and regional biases have further disfigured the facts and marred their interpretation.

It is lamentable but not surprising that we as sociologists know little about Jesse Lawson's life and work. His professional career in Washington, D.C., unfolded well outside the exclusive halls of patrician east coast academe and far from the rough-hewn sociological epicenter that was Chicago at the close of the nineteenth century. As a corrective, this chapter updates the cumulative "working hypothesis" that is our disciplinary history. Below, I outline the origins and activities of the NSS and sketch the biography of its energetic architect: the African-American sociologist, Jesse Lawson. Albeit belatedly, let us now acknowledge the centennial of the National Sociological Society.

Jesse Lawson

Jessie Lawson was born on May 8, 1856, at Nanjemoy, Maryland. His parents were Jesse and Charlotte (Price) Lawson. Their son enrolled in Howard University and, subsequently, the Howard Law School, earning the A.B., LL.B., and A.M. degrees in 1881, 1884, and 1885, respectively. Lawson kept current with social issues by attending, from 1901 to 1905, a series of special lectures as a member of the American Academy of Political and Social Science at the University of Pennsylvania. He edited, from 1893 to 1897, the *Colored American*, an African-American newspaper published in Washington, D.C.

Jessie married Rosetta E. Coakley, of Washington, D.C., in 1884, and together they had four children. Rosetta, who entered adulthood as a high school teacher, became a major force in her own right. She received, from Bishop John H. Vincent, her diploma for completing the prescribed course of the Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle in 1884. She later took a degree in chiropractic science and subsequently taught anatomy and physiology courses under the auspices of Frelinghuysen University.

In 1895, "at the suggestion of Professor Jesse Lawson," Rosetta Lawson organized for African-American women "the first Congress of Women held in the United States" (Davis 1933, 217). When the National Association of Colored Women emerged in 1896 from the fusion of the National Federation of Afro-American Women and the National League of Colored Women, Rosetta was elected to the Executive Committee (*Woman's Era* 1896). Centrally, she was for thirty years a national organizer for the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), traveling throughout the US, and eventually to inter-national conferences in Scotland and France, to speak for the goals of the WCTU.³ In 1905 she organized the YWCA in Washington, D.C. She also helped found the Alley Improvement Association, an organization dedicated to better housing for the poorest of the poor in Washington, D.C. Together, Jesse and Rosetta formed a hard-working, activist partnership.⁴

³ See, for examples and documentation of her work, R. Lawson (1903a, b, 1905) and *Colored American* (1904).

⁴ For additional details of Rosetta's life, see Davis (1933) and Lambeth (1996).

Jesse Lawson was, for several years, a legal examiner at the U.S. Bureau of Pensions, starting in 1882. Also serving at the Bureau of Pensions, until about 1887, was S. Laing Williams, the noted husband of sociologist Fannie Barrier Williams (Deegan 2002b). It would beg credulity to assume that these two young, energetic African-American lawyers remained strangers to each other. This presumed link to Williams further locates Lawson in an important network of early Black sociologists. As a known quantity, Lawson (1887) was invited to present a lecture on "The Ethics of the Labor Problem" to the prestigious Bethel Literary and Historical Association. He began his academic career as a Lecturer in Sociology in the Lyceum of the Second Baptist Church in Washington, D.C., and, in 1906, was named President and Professor of Sociology and Ethics of the Bible College and Institute for Civic and Social Betterment (Mather 1915). The latter post positioned Lawson to become President of a novel educational experiment: Frelinghuysen University, in Washington, D.C.

Frelinghuysen University⁵ was created in 1917 by the merger of the Bible Educational Association (of which Howard University's Kelly Miller was president) and the Bible College (of which Lawson was president). According to Chateauvert (1988, 264–65):

The founders [of Frelinghuysen University] created a school that differed remarkably from other post-secondary institutions of the time. Designed for the non-elite population, Frelinghuysen scheduled classes when working people could participate. Long distance commutes that prevented working people from attending traditional campus-based courses were resolved by using a "home college" system with classes meeting at various locations throughout the city. Finally, high tuition rates that prohibited access to Howard University were undercut by setting costs for courses at the lowest possible rate and requiring monthly, instead of semester, payments.

Under Jessie Lawson's leadership, Frelinghuysen attained a degree of prominence during its first two decades of this century. . . . Frelinghuysen emphasized both Booker T. Washington's trade and semi-professional training approach and W.E.B. DuBois' push for professional education. As a result, the school had a broad appeal.

When Jesse Lawson, the first president of Frelinghuysen, opened the doors of the new school, the Lawsons apparently welcomed students

⁵ Named to honor Frederick T. Frelinghuysen, a white U.S. Senator from New Jersey who championed Black rights.

literally into their own home, at 2011 Vermont Avenue, NW, in Washington, D.C. In 1921, Frelinghuysen purchased a house at 1800 Vermont Avenue, NW, for classroom use, and then sold it in 1927 when a larger building was purchased at 601 M Street, NW. The “home grown” approach of Frelinghuysen continued with sociologist Anna Julia Cooper, the second president of Frelinghuysen, who also offered classes in her home, at 201 T Street, NW, during her leadership of the school from 1930 to 1939.⁶

A Republican, Jesse Lawson was a delegate to the Republican National Convention in 1884. He was the founder and president of the National Sociological Society, in 1903, and later joined the Southern Sociological Congress. Other accomplishments included service as president of the National Emancipation Commemorative Society, organized in 1909. Working side by side with his wife, Rosetta, they dedicated their lives to race betterment. Jesse Lawson died on November 8, 1927.

Jesse Lawson’s biographical record is only partially known at present (and clearly deserves more intensive study and research), but sufficient evidence exists to claim him as a *bona fide* sociologist. Dirk Käsler (1981), in reconstructing the history of German sociology, pragmatically defined a sociologist as anyone who fulfilled at least *one* of the following criteria:

- occupy a chair of sociology and/or teach sociology,
- membership in the German Sociological Society,
- coauthorship of sociological articles or textbooks,
- self-definition as a “sociologist”
- definition by others as a sociologist.

Deegan (1988a) used parallel criteria to demonstrate that Jane Addams, too often and too easily dismissed as *solely* a social worker or social reformer, was in fact a substantial and accomplished sociologist. When Deegan substituted the American Sociological Society for the German Sociological Society, Addams more than met *all* of Käsler’s criteria. Hill (1989) subsequently employed the Käsler/Deegan criteria to classify the well-known American jurist, Roscoe Pound, as a full-fledged sociologist. Deegan (2000) revisited these criteria, inso-

⁶ According to the African American Heritage Trail Database, the university became the Frelinghuysen Group of Schools for Colored Working People in 1940, and lasted into the 1950s, when the institution finally ceased operation.

far as they apply to African-American women in sociology, and concluded that the study of African-American sociologists calls for additional modifications in Käsler's original scheme. So, too, in the case of Jesse Lawson. For example, Lawson organized the National Sociological Society *before* membership in the American Sociological Society was chronologically possible, and Lawson did later join the Southern Sociological Congress. Thus, the Käsler/Deegan criteria are here further amended to include membership in *any* formal sociological society or association, not solely the American Sociological Society/Association.

Given the modified Käsler/Deegan criteria, Jesse Lawson clearly deserves recognition as a sociologist. Specifically: (1) He lectured on sociology in the Lyceum of the Second Baptist Church of Washington, D.C., and was later professor of sociology and ethics at the International Bible College in Washington, D.C.; (2) he was a founder and member of formal sociological societies, including founding the National Sociological Society and membership in the Southern Sociological Congress; (3) he wrote articles and edited a book about the sociological aspects of race relations, *How to Solve the Race Problem*, in 1904; (4) he defined himself primarily as a "sociologist" in information supplied to *Who's Who of the Colored Race* (Mather, 1915: 173); and (5) he was identified as a sociologist by others, including contemporary reportage in the *New York Times* and, more recently, by the editors of Booker T. Washington's personal papers (Harlan, Kaufman, and Smock 1972-1989, III, 570). And, in 1904, when the editors of *World Today* invited several noted African-Americans to write essays for a symposium on the race problem, Lawson (1904b) found himself in the stellar sociological company of W.E.B. DuBois (1904), Kelly Miller (1904), Booker T. Washington (1904a), and Ida B. Wells-Barnett (1904). In sum, Jesse Lawson meets *all* of the Käsler/Deegan criteria as here amended. Undoubtedly the most important of Lawson's sociological accomplishments was his instrumental work as founder and president of the National Sociological Society.

The National Sociological Society of 1903

The dawn of the Twentieth Century witnessed the continuing deterioration of race relations in the United States and the sustained promulgation and perverse implementation of Jim Crow legislation

in the American South (Luker 1991). This problematic setting led Booker T. Washington, in February, 1903, to call for a national conference to address the growing race problem. Recounting his address to the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences, the *New York Times* (1903a, 7) reported that Washington:

... said that he believed the time had come when representative white men of the North and South should meet with negroes and consider with calmness and business sagacity the whole subject as viewed from every aspect.

Jesse Lawson heeded Washington's call, and in little more than eight months he organized and hosted the National Sociological Society meeting of 1903. Lawson succeed in bringing whites and African Americans together for substantive discussions on the crisis in race relations, and edited the conference proceedings: *How to Solve the Race Problem: The Proceedings of the Washington Conference on the Race Problem in the United States under the auspices of the National Sociological Society* (Lawson 1904c).

Lawson's promotion of the NSS was supported by key figures in the American Negro Academy (ANA), a small, exclusive African-American intellectual society founded in 1897.⁷ The ANA and the National Sociological Society (NSS) were both based in Washington, D.C. Unlike the ANA, however, which restricted membership exclusively to invited African-American men with college degrees, NSS membership was open to "any person of good character" who subscribed to the goals of the organization, subject to approval by the NSS Membership Committee. The NSS charged no fee or assessment for dues.⁸ The partial list of NSS members records the names of 164 persons (Lawson 1904c, 271–78), including men of both races from North and South.⁹

⁷ The full nature of Lawson's links to members of the ANA, such as Kelly Miller, and the ANA itself, remain largely undocumented at this writing (see, for example, Moss 1981, who made no mention of Lawson or the NSS). Miller was not only a founder of the ANA, he authored the first of the ANA's long series of Occasional Papers (Miller 1897). Moore's (1999) promising study of the African American elite in Washington, D.C., from 1880–1920, was unfortunately discovered too late for discussion in this chapter.

⁸ Jesse Lawson to George A. Meyers, December 17, 1903, Box 12, Folder 4, George A. Meyers Papers. According to *The World Today* 6 (Jan. 1904, 15), some 3,000 members joined the NSS.

⁹ Not all NSS members attended the Washington meeting, and Lawson clearly solicited memberships "for publication" well after the conference ended (Lawson to Meyers, December 17, 1903).

The complexity and tensions within the Black community regarding racial issues at this time, are illustrated by the NSS membership of Charles Waddell Chesnutt.¹⁰ Chesnutt, who joined the NSS, had earlier refused membership in the ANA. Moss (1981, 76) recounts:

Chesnutt's polite rejection of the invitation [to join the ANA] was almost certainly related to his disapproval of any stress on the uniquely "Negro" heritage of American blacks and of separatism as a solution to the race issue, both positions legitimately associated with the academy, even though they were not accepted by all members.¹¹

Given Booker T. Washington's advocacy of a national meeting between African Americans and whites, and his subsequent membership in the NSS, it is not surprising that sociologist W.E.B. DuBois (the second president of the ANA) did not participate in the NSS.¹² Nonetheless, as Moss (1981) observed, not all ANA members adopted separatist or elitist positions, and at least nineteen then present or future members of the ANA were also counted in the membership of the NSS.¹³ Importantly, Kelly Miller, one of the original founders of the ANA, served instrumentally as the NSS Corresponding Secretary and as a member of the NSS Permanent Commission on the American Race Problem. Arthur Ulysses Craig was NSS Recording Secretary. Walter H. Brooks and Owen Meredith Waller served on the NSS Executive Committee. John W. Cromwell, another ANA founder, was also an NSS member. Core participants in the ANA were active supporters and members of the NSS leadership. Jesse Lawson's ability to draw key ANA members to public endorsement of the cooperative goals of the NSS was no small accomplishment. It should be noted too that whereas Booker T. Washington was a member of the NSS, and spoke briefly to the 1903 NSS meeting (Washington 1904b), he held no official position within the organization. A final and important note regarding membership in both the ANA and the

¹⁰ Chesnutt was a Cleveland attorney whose short stories were published in the *Atlantic Monthly* (Moss 1981, 75).

¹¹ Moss refers readers interested in Chesnutt to Keller (1973).

¹² For the record, Washington was invited to join the ANA, and initially promised a letter of support, but never followed through with the letter or his dues (Moss 1981, 10 *passim*). DuBois became an early member of the ANA and served as its second president, from 1898 to 1903.

¹³ Specifically: C.E. Bentley, J.W.E. Bowen, W.H. Brooks, R.C. Bruce, G.W. Cook, A.U. Craig, J.W. Cromwell, J.R. Hawkins, W.A. Hawkins, L.M. Hershaw, J. Hurst, C.C. Johnson, J.A. Johnson, K. Miller, J. Mitchell, Jr., L.B. Moore, W.S. Scarborough, W.A. Sinclair, and O.M. Waller.

NSS is that the ANA was rigorously chauvinist as well as racially exclusive, and the NSS recorded no known women's names on its published membership roll. Archival deposits, however, reveal the NSS membership of Eartha M.M. White, a prominent African-American from Jacksonville, Florida.¹⁴ In any event, public sessions of the NSS were, presumably, open to all women and men who wished to attend.¹⁵

The activist, purposeful goals of the NSS were clearly specified in Article II of the organization's constitution and by-laws, here quoted verbatim (Lawson 1904c, 279):

ARTICLE II

OBJECTS

The objects of the organization are:

1. To gather and collate data bearing on the American *Race Problem*.
2. To formulate plans and suggest measures with the patriotic view of bringing about a better understanding between the races in the United States.
3. To study thoroughly, systematically, and scientifically every phase of the *Race Problem* with a view of finding some remedy to relieve a strained situation made possible by the existence of said problem.
4. To find some common ground upon which all of the friends of our common cause may stand, and to adjust the different and divergent views, respecting the solution of the *Race Problem*, into a definite and harmonious proposition.
5. To print and distribute literature containing information considered as data in the solution of the *Race Problem*.
6. To cultivate a spirit of patriotism.
7. To endeavor to bring about a more harmonious relation between the races under the American Government.

Comparisons to the membership and constitution of the American Sociological Society (ASS) are striking and instructive. The ASS, with an initial roster of 115 members, was genuinely open to women, including Jane Addams, Emily Greene Balch, Kate Claghorn, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Annie Marion MacLean, Mary McDowell, Anna Garlin Spencer, and Marion Talbot, among others (*American Journal of Sociology* 1907). There were, apparently, no African Americans among

¹⁴ Membership card, National Sociological Society, File M3, Number 2446, Eartha M.M. White Collection.

¹⁵ The *Colored American* (1903a, 7) advised that "public meetings will be held at the 19th Street Baptist Church, on Monday evening, Nov. 9th, and on Tuesday evening, Nov. 10th."

the founders of the ASS, and there was no overlap between the membership of the NSS and the ASS. The ASS and the NSS comprised totally separate social nets. The stated objective of the ASS was more amorphous than that of the NSS. Article II ("Constitution of the American Sociological Society" 1907, 735) stated simply:

The objects of this society shall be the encouragement of sociological research and discussion, and the promotion of intercourse between persons engaged in the scientific study of society.

There was thus significant convergence with the NSS, insofar as its constitution called for: (a) the gathering and collation of data, (b) thorough, systematic, and scientific study, and (c) the publication of data.

The ASS and the NSS differed radically, however, in terms of committed social action. Where the founders of the ASS retreated from the world and discouraged the society from passing "any resolution approving or disapproving specific sociological doctrines or specific schemes for social betterment" (Rhoades 1918, 8), the NSS specifically sought to "formulate plans and suggest measures with the patriotic view of bringing about a better understanding between the races in the United States" and to adjust different and divergent scientific views "into a definite and harmonious proposition" with respect to "the solution of the *Race Problem*." It is not just the fact that the NSS and the ASA comprised disjoint social nets, they also adopted antithetical stances on the *use* of the "thorough, systematic, and scientific study" of data for the express purpose of "social betterment."

The hard work of organizing the first and major meeting of the National Sociological Society began in earnest on October 1, 1903, with the wide distribution of a circular letter printed on the official letterhead of the National Sociological Society, and issued from the office of Kelly Miller, Corresponding Secretary, Howard University. The letter opened:

Dear Sir:

Believing that the situation brought about by the race problem in the United States, can be relieved only by the best efforts of the people of both races, North and South, and feeling assured that there is sufficient wisdom, patriotism and love of fair play among the American people to enable them to cope with any situation, however grave, it has been decided by the National Sociological Society—an organization for the study of the condition of the colored people of the United States, and to suggest plans for the improvement of that condition—

to call a conference to be held at Washington, D.C., November 9–11, 1903—at the time for the assembling of Congress in extraordinary session—to deliberate on the most serious phases of the race question, and to formulate plans for the relief of a strained situation.¹⁶

The resulting large meeting, expanded to four days and thus extended through November 12, was spread over three venues in Washington, D.C.: the Lincoln Temple Congregational Church, the Nineteenth Street Baptist Church, and the Metropolitan A.M.E. Church.

Discussions and presentations during the four-day NSS meeting were organized under five specific headings (Lawson 1904c, 22):

1. The nature and cause of race prejudice
2. Factors in the solution of the problem
 - A. Education
 - B. Statesmanship
 - C. Religion
 - D. Philanthropy
3. Proposed solutions
 - A. Race segregation
 - B. Distribution among the States
 - C. Colonization
 - D. Race harmony
4. Special problems
 - A. The City Negro
 - B. Rape and lynching
 - C. The Negro as an industrial factor
 - D. The Negro as a patriot
5. The necessity for a Commission to consider the various phases of the race problem

The details of the conference are best understood by careful perusal of the full published *Proceedings* (Lawson 1904c).¹⁷

Overall, the conferees affirmed the equal citizenship of all Americans, as guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States. Specifically, they concluded (Lawson 1904c, 3):

That under our form of government there can be no recognition of a master class and a subject class or of a master race and a subject race, but all classes and races must be treated as equals in the eyes

¹⁶ National Sociological Society to [unknown], October 1, 1903, Box 12, Folder 3, George A. Myers Papers.

¹⁷ This task is made somewhat easier by the republication of the *Proceedings* by the Afro-Am Press, of Chicago, in 1969. A desultory summary of the meeting is provided by Luker (1991, 227–30) who failed, perhaps understandably, to approach the event with a sociological imagination.

of the law. Every statute should apply to the whole people without distinction of class or race.

They went on record deploring mob violence as well as the crime of rape, asserting that "crime of any character is most effectually prevented or punished by the regular processes of the law" (Lawson 1904c, 5).

With regard to solving the race problem *per se*, the Conference unequivocally found that: "As solutions to the race problem we regard colonization, expatriation and segregation as unworthy of further consideration" (Lawson 1904c, 5). It is thus unpardonable that, more than a half century later, in remarks to the American Sociological Association, former ASA President Charles P. Loomis proposed building a "second Israel" for Negroes in the Andes mountains of South America (Leo 1968c, 18).¹⁸ The 1903 Conference encouraged a variety of cooperative solutions to the race problem that utilized the social institutions of education, religion,¹⁹ economy, and government. And finally, the NSS endorsed appointment of a federal-level, bi-racial Commission on the race problem.

In a subsequent article, Lawson (1904a, 577) stressed that the work of the proposed Commission must be guided by sound social research procedures, specifically:

[T]here must be a practical handing of the subject by scientific methods; that the facts must be ascertained through induction, and that the scope of the investigation, while well-defined and specific, must be broad and comprehensive enough to includes all elements that enter as factors into the solution of the problem.

Here was a clear-cut proposal for systematic, multi-factor analyses of a major social issue, and it deserves a place in the historical litany of important studies of Black-white relations that followed eventually, if not directly, in its wake.

Media reactions to the 1903 NSS meeting were mixed. The New York *Times* (1903b) gave positive notice and provided a detailed list of speakers when the NSS conference was announced. Likewise, the same paper (New York *Times* 1903c, d) also reported in detail on the NSS endorsement of a federal commission on the race problem.

¹⁸ For further discussion, see Mary Jo Deegan's chapter on "Women, African Americans, and the ASA, 1905–2005," elsewhere in this volume.

¹⁹ Lawson, a Baptist, later expanded on the potential role of the Catholic Church in working for improvements in race relations (Cleveland *Journal* 1906).

Reportage in the Black press was more problematic. The Chicago *Broadaxe* (1903) ignored the conference entirely, choosing instead to lambast an earlier speech given by Booker T. Washington in North Carolina as an "oratorical failure." The Washington *Bee* (1903a, b, c) praised the NSS address made by H.B.F. Macfarland, President of the Board of Commissions of the District of Columbia, while somewhat gleefully noting that Booker T. Washington was not wholeheartedly welcomed at the NSS conference, and later sniping that Washington's followers were comparable to "sheep." As expected, the *Colored American* (1903a, b, c, d), published in Washington, DC, and for which Jesse Lawson was a former editor, gave enthusiastic support to the NSS meetings and reported the conference in a highly favorable light. Elsewhere, the Indianapolis *Freeman* (1903a, b) also provided positive, sympathetic coverage. The disparate reporting, represented by the *Broadaxe* and the *Bee*, on the one hand, and the *Colored American* and the *Freeman*, on the other, reflected serious divisions between contentious factions within the African-American community itself.

Conclusion

The National Sociological Society meeting in 1903 was an early, organized effort that brought thoughtful people, African and white Americans, from across the country, to fashion a formal, cooperative, social scientific approach to solving racial injustice in America. Subsequent meetings of the NSS were planned for 1905, but the precise fate of this anticipated conference is not yet documented.²⁰ The NSS was short lived, but it provides today a concrete, alternative model of sociological networks, organization, and constructive action for social betterment. In providing an early alternative to racism and apolitical practice, the NSS is part the long and venerable history of liberation sociology. The willingness of the NSS to tackle a serious social issue flies boldly in the face of the ASA's long-standing tradition of side-stepping so-called "political" issues such as peace and war, gay rights, and social equity generally. The time has come to enroll Jesse Lawson and the National Sociological Society in the annals of our disciplinary history.

²⁰ Jesse Lawson to George A. Meyers, September 3, 1904, Box 13, Folder 2, George A. Myers Papers.